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Viewing cable 09PORTAUPRINCE601, HAITI: FEW IRREGULARITIES, LOW TURNOUT IN SECOND

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#09PORTAUPRINCE601.

| Reference ID | Created | Released | Classification | Origin |
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| 09PORTAUPRINCE601 | 2009-06-23 19:19 | 2011-08-30 01:44 | CONFIDENTIAL | Embassy Port Au Prince |

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SUBJECT: HAITI: FEW IRREGULARITIES, LOW TURNOUT IN SECOND
ROUND OF PARTIAL SENATE ELECTIONS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Thomas C. Tighe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Embassy observers noted low turnout but few irregularities, better organization, and greater security in the second round of voting in Haiti's partial Senate elections June 21. UN peacekeepers and Haitian police deployed more effectively than in the first round, acting quickly to quell disruptions, make high-profile arrests, and fend off isolated attempts by party militants to threaten polling stations. At least one reported death was apparently election-related, and unidentified perpetrators stole or destroyed ballot boxes in a small number of locations. We expect candidates aligned closely with President Rene Preval to fare well in the balloting, although preliminary results will not be available before the end of the week. End summary.

EMBASSY OBSERVERS REPORT FEW PROBLEMS, LOW TURNOUT

¶2. (SBU) Voting in the second round of Haiti's partial Senate elections took place June 21 in an environment of relative calm. The Embassy's observers reported low turnout throughout the country, especially in Port-au-Prince, but few signs of significant irregularities. Most estimated voter turnout at or below the eleven percent registered during the first round of elections April 19, a phenomenon attributable in part to low interest in these purely legislative elections and modest voter education efforts by Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP). Observers reported that many polling stations in the Port-au-Prince area at the 4:00 PM closing time had only one or two ballots cast in addition to those of the pollworkers and pollwatchers.

¶3. (SBU) The exclusion of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas party from these elections may have also modestly reduced turnout, especially given that flyers threatening prospective voters again circulated before the second round of balloting. The week before the election, MINUSTAH detected at least two leaflets on the streets warning voters to stay home on election day and threatening them with death should they venture out. One of the leaflets warned voters that the ballots had been printed in Mexico (note: by law, they are printed in Haiti) where they had been impregnated with the deadly swine flu virus.

¶4. (SBU) Although a few polling stations opened late, Haiti's electoral council kept many of the organizational problems that plagued the first round of elections April 19 at bay. Election materials were for the most part distributed to polling stations on time. Most poll workers had received their required training in the days before the vote, although last-minute substitutions and disputes involving workers saying they were not yet paid for their first round work created some complications.

PEACEKEEPERS, POLICE VIGOROUSLY RESPOND

¶5. (C) SRSR Hedi Annabi told international community representatives June 21 that MINUSTAH and PNH forces had responded firmly to incidents of fraud or violence. He lauded the security cooperation between the CEP, PNH, and MINUSTAH. UN forces were instructed to treat any attempt to

disrupt the electoral process as interference with their core function as peacekeepers, Annabi added. He commended the PNH for their efforts and their decision to search even vehicles with state or official registrations in order to prevent disruptions of the electoral process.

¶16. (SBU) Near Belle Anse (Southeast), the PNH arrested the brother of senatorial candidate Wenceslas Lambert and sitting senator Joseph Lambert (Lespwa) for the illegal possession of firearms. (Note: The HNP had suspended all gun permits on election day. Lambert's brother was later released, according to a press report, although three other men arrested at the same time apparently remain in custody. End note.) The mayor of Jeremie (Grand Anse) was reportedly arrested in a dispute with an electoral worker, and a weapon was seized from a Deputy in Pignon (North). In the Artibonite, a representative of independent candidate Michelet Louis was arrested with ten national identity cards in his possession. Protests over the minimum wage continued in Port-au-Prince on election day as some students threw rocks at passersby from inside the university's courtyard. A heavy police presence kept the protestors confined to the courtyard; the CEP had moved two polling stations away from the affected area as a precaution.

ISOLATED CASES OF FRAUD, VIOLENCE, INTIMIDATION REPORTED

¶17. (SBU) Despite vigorous efforts of peacekeepers and police, there was some election-related violence. In Grand Anse, near Jeremie, a man died in unclear circumstances during a politically motivated altercation. Senator Lambert claimed to the press June 21 that a Lespwa militant had been killed in the Southeast in an election-related dispute, although this report has not been confirmed. Also in the Southeast Department, MINUSTAH reported that a machete fight broke out in Belle Anse and a voting center was set on fire in Mapou. Small demonstrations caused the temporary closure of two voting centers in the Artibonite, and MINUSTAH forces were called in to disperse isolated disturbances in the North and Northeast Departments. Ballots were destroyed by unknown perpetrators shortly after the voting concluded in three polling stations in the Northeast.

COMMENT: BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

¶18. (SBU) As President Preval told a visiting Congressional delegation June 22, the peaceful conduct of these long-overdue elections is a critical step forward for Haiti, despite the low turnout and isolated irregularities. Vacancies in the Senate have hobbled the Parliament for over a year, and these elections provided a needed test of the new electoral law that will serve as the framework for legislative elections needed later this year and presidential elections in 2010. We will urge the relevant authorities to follow up on substantiated accusations of violence and fraud.

TIGHE